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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/AND, WHA/PD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: RADIO LA LUNA AND ITS ROLE IN THE ECUADORIAN
CRISIS

1. Summary. Quito's Radio La Luna has become a focal point of anti-government sentiment and action during the last several weeks, successfully serving as a vehicle for anti-institutional sentiment from all segments of the political spectrum and all classes of Ecuadorian society. Although Radio Luna is historically leftist, anti-U.S., and not above engaging in blatant disinformation campaigns, it would be a mistake to ascribe its recent popularity and leadership role exclusively to leftist or foreign elements. The hostility of the Gutierrez administration toward the station only served to increase its importance and popularity. End Summary.

What is Radio La Luna

2. Radio La Luna is a small, independent radio station that transmits solely in Quito. It provides a mixture of news, opinion, and culture, including music. Since 1995, it has operated under the direction of Paco Velasco, a self-defined independent. In recent years, Velasco and La Luna have opposed all governments. Until recent events, La Luna captured an estimated two percent of the Quito listeners. Current estimates are that it now listened to regularly by over 20 percent of the market.

3. Ideologically, La Luna is decidedly leftist and populist. Run by a small staff, it has a number of volunteers. It has taken a firmly anti-U.S. position, opposing the Manta FOL, and Ecuadorian negotiations for a free trade agreement. La Luna has also strongly criticized what it perceived as U.S. support for the Gutierrez administration. It has burnished its populist credentials by speaking out against institutional corruption.

La Luna's Newfound Popularity

4. On April 13, Quito mayor Paco Moncayo led a call for a provincial wide strike and marches against the government, which was met with a lukewarm response. The evening of April 13, La Luna began a discussion and call-in programs to consider next steps, which resulted in a call for a demonstration in the central Los Shyris area of Quito. Two hours later over 5,000 people had gathered, alerted about the demonstration by La Luna and cellular calls and text messaging. This was the beginning of the "cacerolazo" or pot-banging demonstrations to express dissatisfaction with the political situation. That and horn-honking have since become ubiquitous throughout Quito representing a spontaneous rejection of the status quo. Radio La Luna has remained on air 24 hours a day as its talk shows continue.

5. Numerous mainstream media have rallied to support Paco Velasco. A conservative Embassy journalistic contact describes Velasco as "leftist, but a good person who through his station tries to provide space for democratic and cultural expression". Velasco has also appeared on national television, where he describes his goals as ending corruption and establishing democratic and representative government in Ecuador.

6. During the State of Emergency declared by Gutierrez on April 16 La Luna lost telephone service. The station continued its call-in programming using cellular phones and blamed the government for cutting the lines and preventing their repair. The station has also lost power on occasion, which they also blame on government interference. President Gutierrez' brother, a congressman, has publicly threatened to sue La Luna for defaming the government. The Embassy cautioned the GOE against any provocative action against La Luna, including shutting it down.

Comment

7. Although Radio La Luna should not be viewed as having created the current unstable political situation in Ecuador,

its leftist, populist, often inaccurate reporting, and disinformation, does add fuel to an already inflammatory situation. It is largely perceived, however, as a legitimate vehicle for channeling what many Quiteos across a broad political and class spectrum consider legitimate discontent. Those who condemned it in the past as presenting radical claptrap are now regular listeners and have followed its call to demonstrate. It will continue to influence unfolding events.

Kenney